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ABSTRACT

This booklet summarizes three reports on drug-use and violence-prevention efforts and school-crime patterns in American schools. The reports are based on findings from the Study on School Violence and Prevention, which investigated the extent of problem behavior in schools. The results indicate that schools in general were safe, but certain schools had significant problems that affected instruction and made some teachers and students feel unsafe. The relatively higher rates of discipline problems in middle schools suggest that greater attention to prevention efforts in middle school may be warranted. Schools should focus on improving prevention activities by strengthening efforts to adopt, retain, or discard programs based on their effectiveness. While fighting did occur and the presence of weapons was not unheard of, the combination of the two was rarely seen in the same school. Theft was much more common than robbery, and while teachers may have been verbally abused, they rarely were attacked or threatened with a weapon. The fear of disorder did not seem to interfere with learning. Schools followed similar discipline procedures, but they varied considerably in how they recorded and used incident data. Schools that recorded high violence differed markedly from other schools in their size, location, and socioeconomic makeup. These violent schools tended to be in urban areas with a high percentage of minority students. (RJM)

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WIDE SCOPE, QUESTIONABLE QUALITY

THREE REPORTS FROM THE STUDY ON SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND PREVENTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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WIDE SCOPE, QUESTIONABLE QUALITY

THREE REPORTS FROM THE STUDY ON SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND PREVENTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Wide Scope, Questionable Quality: Drug and Violence Prevention Efforts in American Schools

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A Closer Look at Drug and Violence Prevention Efforts in American Schools

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School Crime Patterns: A National Profile of U.S. Public High Schools Using Rates of Crime Reported to Police

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August 2002

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WIDE SCOPE, QUESTIONABLE QUALITY: DRUG AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION EFFORTS IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Results from the Study on School Violence and Prevention indicate that, while schools nationally experienced relatively low levels of serious violent crime, some schools did experience serious violence and disorder. In many schools, high levels of less serious violent crime and property crime were common, particularly in middle schools. To prevent such problem behavior and make schools more conducive to learning, schools implemented many and diverse prevention activities. However, on the whole, the quality of those prevention activities is poor. These findings, which are for the 1997-98 school year, suggest that schools need to improve the quality of prevention programming through attention to needs assessment, planning, increased use of research-based approaches, and monitoring of implementation.

STUDY BACKGROUND

The study on which these findings are based, the Study on School Violence and Prevention, was funded by the U.S. Department of Education (and conducted in collaboration with the National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice) to investigate the extent of problem behavior in schools nationally and several aspects of delinquency prevention efforts in schools, such as types and quality of prevention efforts, how schools plan and use information about prevention options to improve their own efforts and school management, and sources of funding for school prevention activities.

During spring 1997, 886 elementary and secondary (i.e., both middle school and high school) principals provided information about prevention activities in their schools. During spring 1998, principals and prevention program providers in many of these same schools provided information on prevention efforts, their schools' discipline practices, and Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) funding for prevention activities. In addition, students and teachers in many of the participating secondary schools responded to surveys on their experiences with school disorder and with prevention activities; school district officials associated with these secondary schools also provided information on SDFSCA and non-SDFSCA programs and funding. The patterns of problem behavior found by the current study are generally consistent with those found by other recent studies.

Although this study has many strengths, including the use of multiple information sources to collect detailed information on characteristics of school prevention programming and adequacy of program implementation, it also has limitations, primarily with regard to response rates. Methodological issues are discussed in detail in the report's introduction and appendices.

In the remainder of this summary, we highlight main findings from the study.

PROBLEM BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOLS

During the 1997-98 school year, serious violent crime in schools was relatively infrequent. However, schools did experience high levels of less serious violent crime and property crime that compromised instruction in many classrooms. Middle schools experienced more problem behavior than other schools. On the whole, students and teachers felt safe at schools, although about one-quarter had concerns about safety and disorder.

Schools Reporting Incidents to Police

One measure of school safety and disorder is the number of crimes and disciplinary incidents that come to the attention of school administrators. The study asked principals about the number of crimes that they reported to law enforcement officials. In general, elementary schools tend to experience the lowest rates of serious incidents and middle schools the highest rates.

- According to principal reports, 66 percent of schools experienced one or more incidents of less serious violent crime or property crime (i.e., fighting without a weapon, vandalism, or theft) and 10 percent experienced at least one serious violent crime (i.e., fighting with a weapon or robbery).

- Compared with elementary and high schools, middle schools had higher levels of many types of problem behavior. According to principal reports, 21 percent of middle schools had one or more incidents of physical attack or fight with a weapon, compared to 2 percent of elementary schools and 11 percent of high schools. Principals also reported that 72 percent of middle schools experienced fights without a weapon, compared to 34 percent of elementary schools and 56 percent of high schools.

- Schools with high levels of serious violent crime—"problem schools"—were similar to all other schools on characteristics such as urbanicity (percent urban, suburban, and rural), free and reduced-price school lunch, and enrollment. Problem high schools also did not differ from the other high schools in terms of the percentage of minority students. However, problem middle schools had a higher percentage of minority students than all other middle schools.

Victimization of Students and Teachers

Another measure of school safety and disorder is the amount of victimization experienced by students and teachers while at school. This measure provides an important complement to data obtained from principals about incidents reported to police, since administrators are not always aware of all the incidents that occur in schools. The study asked students and teachers in secondary schools (middle and high schools) about their experiences with various types of crimes and disorderly conduct. Middle school students and teachers were in many cases more likely to be victimized than their high school counterparts.

- Approximately 18 percent of students in secondary schools were threatened with a beating, and 13 percent of students were attacked without a weapon. In terms of serious violent crime, 11 percent of students experienced at least one serious violent incident (robbery or threatened with a weapon) at school.

- A slightly higher percentage of middle school students than high school students were the victims of robbery. For example, 8 percent of middle school students were robbed of $1 or more in school, compared with 4 percent of high school students. Additionally, for all types of less serious violent crime and property crime, a higher percentage of middle schools students than high school students reported being victimized. For example, 19 percent of middle school students were physically attacked in school, compared with 10 percent of high school students.

- Approximately 62 percent of teachers experienced one or more incidents of less serious violent crime or property crime (i.e., threatened in remarks by a student, received obscene remarks or gestures from a student, damage to property, or theft). Forty percent of teachers received obscene remarks or gestures from a student. Serious crime aimed at teachers was relatively rare. Only 3 percent of teachers were attacked and received minor injuries, while even fewer (1%) were either confronted with weapons at school or were attacked and received injuries serious enough to require a doctor.

- A higher percentage of middle school teachers than high school teachers received obscene remarks or gestures from a student (46% of middle school teachers versus 40% of high school teachers) and middle school teachers were more likely (24%) than high school teachers (20%) to be threatened by a student.

- Although students and teachers in problem high schools and in other high schools reported similar levels of victimization, students and teachers in problem middle schools reported significantly higher levels of victimization for many specific types of crime than those in other middle schools.

Effects of Disorder on Teachers and Students

Members of the school community provide different perspectives on how the level of school safety and orderliness affects them.

- While most students and teachers reported feeling safe in their schools, about one-fourth said they would avoid a specific place at school out of fear that someone might hurt or bother them.

- More than one-quarter (27%) of teachers in middle and high schools reported that the behavior of some students kept them from teaching a fair amount or a great deal.

EFFORTS TO PREVENT PROBLEM BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOLS

Schools are implementing a wide range of prevention and disciplinary activities to address problem behavior. Unfortunately, the overall quality of many of these activities is inadequate when assessed against criteria established by the study for judging the quality of practices.

Wide Scope of Prevention Efforts

To reduce problem behavior, schools implemented many and diverse prevention activities.

- On average, each school used 9 out of 14 general types (e.g., counseling and behavior modification) of prevention efforts. Although a few principals reported using no activities at all, many reported using a large number of separate, specific activities—one school reported using 61. The median number of specific prevention activities per school was 14. Approximately 20 percent of schools used at least 25 unique activities and 6 percent reported using at least 40 unique activities.

- The most common type of activity aimed at changing individual behavior was prevention curriculum, instruction, or training (76%), followed by counseling, social work, psychological, or therapeutic services (74%). The most common type of school-wide prevention activity was simply providing students with information. More than 80 percent of schools provided isolated information about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

- Compared with other middle schools, problem middle schools (those with high levels of serious violent crime) used fewer of the different types of activities available to reduce negative behavior. Each problem middle school used approximately six different types of efforts, while each of the other middle schools uses, on average, eight different types of efforts. Problem high schools and other high schools were similar on the number of different prevention efforts implemented.

Low Quality of Prevention Efforts

Judging the quality of prevention activities was a multi-step process that entailed defining dimensions of quality and setting standards of adequacy. The standards of adequacy established for these dimensions were appropriate for the various types of activities. The dimensions and standards were based on expert judgment and a review of the literature on the effectiveness of prevention activities, including optimal planning practices, content, methods, and frequency and duration of activities. (For more detail, see Appendix B.)

While a large quantity of prevention activities were implemented in schools, the quality of those activities needs improvement. In general, activities designed to change the school or classroom environment were higher quality than those directed at altering student behavior or attitudes.

- Prevention activities designed to change the school or classroom environment were generally of higher quality than programs aimed at changing individual student behaviors or attitudes. On one summary measure of quality (average percentage of quality measures judged adequate), scores for different types of activities designed to change the school or classroom environment ranged from 73 percent adequate (for security and surveillance) to 51 percent adequate, while scores for programs aimed at changing individual student behaviors or attitudes ranged from 51 percent adequate to 42 percent adequate (for services and programs for family members).

- Compared to programs aimed at changing individual student behaviors or attitudes, activities designed to change the school or classroom environment tended to achieve higher ratings on several dimensions of quality, including level of use by school personnel, best practices for content, best practices for methods, duration, and frequency of operation.

- The quality of prevention programs is lowest in rural areas and highest in urban areas, though the difference is modest. Approximately 55 percent of the prevention activities in rural areas were judged adequate, compared to 60 percent of the activities in urban areas.

- For almost every type of program and each dimension examined, the quality of implementation was similar between the problem schools and other schools (at both the middle and high school levels).

Mixed Quality of Disciplinary Practices

Schools successfully communicated rules to students and monitored and recorded violations of those rules. However, schools need improvement on the range of responses that they make to student conduct and on the predictability and consistency of their disciplinary practices.

- Most schools communicated rules to students and monitored and recorded violations of rules. More than 95 percent of schools provided teachers, students, and parents with a copy of the school rules. Some 93 percent of schools were following best practices for communication and documentation of school rules and for keeping track of student behavior.

- Overall, schools used a variety of responses to desirable and undesirable student behavior. However, relatively few individual schools merited a "best practices" rating for the range of appropriate responses to misconduct (27%) and range of appropriate responses to desirable behavior (20%).

QUALITY OF PLANNING AND USE OF RESEARCH FOR PREVENTION ACTIVITIES

Mixed Picture on Quality of Planning

Sound planning (including identifying goals, selecting activities, and making decisions about how to target prevention efforts) is important, in part, because it was associated with high quality prevention activities. The planning that underlies prevention activities in schools was frequently influenced by school districts. Planning to meet school-wide prevention objectives tended to be of higher quality than the planning of individual-level prevention activities.

- The planning of prevention efforts was often influenced or shaped by the school district. Districts for almost one-half of middle and high schools required the schools to participate in needs assessments or an evaluation by administering district-sponsored surveys. Districts for 60 percent of these schools also required the schools to pick prevention activities from a list or at least offer this type of list. The majority of districts provided support for school planning of prevention activities in the form of assistance with conducting needs assessments, training on program planning and development, and training on program implementation. District involvement in school-level planning is important, in part, because districts often have greater expertise and resources to support planning than individual schools.

- Planning for many of the individual level prevention activities was weak. Although many individual-level prevention activities meet some criteria of sound planning, less than two-thirds of these activities met all of the criteria. However, planning for school-wide prevention efforts appeared to be considerably stronger than the planning for individual level activities.

- Problem schools (those with high levels of serious violent crime) and other schools tended to be similar on many aspects of program planning. However, problem middle schools were more often required to receive direction and assistance from their school districts, and are more often required to conduct some type of needs assessment or evaluation. Compared with other middle schools, problem middle schools are also more often required to prepare plans specifying how prevention resources will be

used. For high schools, a higher percentage of problem schools than other schools receive training on program implementation.

Insufficient Use of Research

Although schools generally consulted a number of sources in selecting their activities, they typically placed a lower priority on research-based sources.

- On average, schools used two resources to select a given prevention activity. The resources most often used to select a prevention activity were other program providers (57% of activities) and meetings within the school district (51% of activities).
- Research-based information was among the less frequently used sources for activity selection. Formal outcome evaluations and publications summarizing research were used in the selection of 28 percent and 38 percent of activities, respectively.
- Perhaps as a result of the limited use of research-based information, only one-third of the prevention activities used methods or approaches found to be effective in the research literature, while 61 percent of the activities used content whose effectiveness was supported by research.

SDFSCA IMPORTANT TO FUNDING FOR SCHOOL PREVENTION EFFORTS

The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) Program was the most common funding source for prevention activities in schools, though districts and schools also drew on a variety of other funding sources. Districts used SDFSCA funds to support diverse prevention activities. This funding was very important to district prevention programming.

- Districts for approximately 98 percent of schools nationally, public and private, provided prevention activities that were funded at least in part by SDFSCA. Many districts also drew on a wide variety of other federal, state, and local funding sources to support their prevention efforts.
- Districts used their SDFSCA funds for diverse prevention activities, including direct activities for students and indirect activities such as staff training. Activities that received a high degree of SDFSCA support include prevention instruction or training, counseling, and prevention activities to improve instructional practices in the classrooms.
- In the schools for which principals reported using SDFSCA funds, almost one-half of the principals stated that these funds were very important to improving or maintaining the safety and orderliness of their school, or in preventing problem behavior.

CONCLUSIONS

Several conclusions follow from the study's findings. Although schools in general were relatively safe, certain schools had significant problems that affected instruction and made some teachers and students feel unsafe. Clearly, approaches to preventing problem behavior in schools need improvement, particularly in light of the central findings that schools nationally were implementing a large number of prevention efforts but the quality of those efforts was low overall.

The findings of relatively higher rates of discipline problems in middle schools suggest that greater attention to prevention efforts in middle school may be warranted. Attention to middle school problems may also aid in preventing discipline problems in high school.

Schools also should consider focusing on improving the quality of their activities. Schools might start by strengthening efforts to adopt, retain, or discard prevention efforts based on research evidence on program effectiveness. In general, schools need to be more consistent in consulting the research literature and using that information to guide their prevention efforts. Given limited resources for prevention, focusing resources on strengthening promising, research-based activities—even at the expense of discontinuing weaker activities—may help schools and districts to better achieve their prevention goals.

Another area where improvement could be addressed is in the area of program planning, monitoring, and evaluation. Strengthening needs assessments, including collecting information on the prevalence of problem behavior, would assist schools and districts in identifying problem areas to allow for better targeting of prevention efforts. Greater emphasis on monitoring the implementation of prevention activities would help to ensure that they remain consistent with program models. Collecting information on the results of activities is critical to gauging which activities are proving effective and which need to be strengthened or discontinued.

Schools and districts can also focus on the predictors of program quality. In their report on this study, Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Czeh, Cantor, Crosse, and Hantman (2000) identified several predictors, including extensiveness and quality of training of the staff that implement the activities and supervision of the activities. The increased costs associated with these and other factors could be offset, in part, by decisions to fund fewer but stronger activities.

Ideally, along with a greater focus on research, schools will adopt a "continuous improvement" process, whereby quality of implementation, results of activities, and incidents of problem behavior are tracked to serve as a basis for modifying activities and developing future plans.

Resources for Improving Quality

Districts and schools have a variety of sources available to them to assist in identifying effective programs and activities. For example, the 1999 Annual Report on School Safety, a joint publication of the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education, provides descriptions of model programs designated as promising or of demonstrated effectiveness, along with resource lists of agencies, organizations, and websites for further information. (See www.ed.gov/PDFDocs/InterimAR.pdf.) The U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools program used an expert panel process to identify exemplary and promising drug and violence prevention programs based on evidence of effectiveness. (See www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/ORAD/KAD/expert_panel/2001exemplary_sddfs.html and www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/ORAD/KAD/expert_panel/2001promising_sddfs.html.) Additional information on developing high-quality school-based prevention programs is available from the Safe and Drug-Free Schools program website. (See www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS/.)

A CLOSER LOOK
AT DRUG AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION EFFORTS IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

As part of the 1994 reauthorization of SDFSCA, Congress mandated that the U.S. Department of Education (ED) collect information on efforts to prevent violence in schools nationally. Consequently, ED initiated the Study on School Violence and Prevention to describe the level of problem behavior, including violence, in schools; to learn about the measures that schools are taking to prevent problem behavior and promote school safety; and to examine the use of funds allocated through SDFSCA.

The Study on School Violence and Prevention was a cooperative effort between the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice (NIJ). At the same time that ED commissioned the Study on School Violence and Prevention, NIJ awarded a grant to conduct the National Study of Delinquency Prevention in Schools. To maximize resources and minimize the burden to schools, the agencies and external researchers agreed to merge many of the study activities. In this report, we refer to the project as the Study on School Violence and Prevention; in NIJ and other publications, the project is called the National Study of Delinquency Prevention in Schools.

This report focuses on one of three study components, referred to as the "intensive level." It is the first study in over 20 years to examine in detail what schools are doing to promote school safety. While the intensive level component is an in-depth examination of a limited number of schools, the two other study components (national and intermediate level components) are based on broad surveys of national probability samples of schools. This report is organized in accordance with the topics covered by the study questions:

- Extent of problem behavior in schools, including the types of victimization experienced by students and teachers, and how students and teachers perceive the safety of their schools. Also included is a description of incident reporting systems.
- Efforts used by schools to prevent problem behavior and the quality of their implementation. These efforts include formal curricular programs as well as disciplinary practices and policies, and security measures. Observations on school climate are presented here.

- Planning processes used by schools and districts for prevention activities and the use of information (e.g., on effectiveness) in doing so.

- Results of efforts to compare schools that differed on the extent of problem behavior. These results allowed us to consider the characteristics and processes that distinguish safe and unsafe schools.

METHOD

The intensive level study gathered extensive qualitative and quantitative information from a purposive sample of 40 schools (20 middle schools and 20 senior high schools). All of these schools were among the over 230 schools that surveyed students during 1998 as part of an earlier phase of the study. We limited our selection to public secondary schools. In selecting the schools, we sought to include schools that varied on instructional level (middle schools and senior high schools), number of students enrolled (small and large schools), and metropolitan status (urban, suburban, and rural schools). In addition, we selected earlier schools that varied on safety, based primarily on information obtained from our surveys of principals, teachers, and students.

We collected qualitative and quantitative information from diverse sources at each of the 40 schools in the intensive level study. The primary vehicle for collecting this information was three-day site visits to the schools. While at the schools, site visitors made systematic observations; reviewed records on incidents of violence; conducted focus groups with teachers and students; and conducted in-depth interviews with district officials, principals, and school staff. In addition, we surveyed all teachers and a sample of students.

One of the strengths of this study is that it combines quantitative and qualitative information from a wide variety of sources. The quantitative information represents each school with fairly high precision. The qualitative information provides, from multiple perspectives, details and insights that are typically unavailable with surveys. A limitation of the study is that the sample varied little on the measures of safety we used for the intensive level. As a result, this limited our ability to compare and contrast characteristics that distinguish safe from unsafe schools.

KEY FINDINGS

Disorder in Schools

Overall, the site visitors found that the vast majority of the schools have relatively low levels of serious crime[1]. This was borne out by the surveys of students and teachers. While fighting did occur and the presence of weapons was not unheard of, the combination of the two was rarely seen in the same school. Theft was much more common than robbery, and while teachers may have been verbally abused, they very rarely were attacked or threatened with a weapon.

Fear of disorder did not seem to interfere with the learning process. Even though the schools visited were predominantly free of serious violence, less serious incidents still could have contributed to apprehension about being in school. This did not seem to be the case, however, in most of the schools included in the study. Site visitors at roughly two-thirds of the schools unanimously described their schools as safe or very safe, with low or very low levels of disorder. Similarly, about a third of the site visitors reported that the schools they visited were completely orderly and safe. Only one site visiting team characterized their school as "unsafe."

While most schools followed similar discipline procedures, they varied quite a bit in how they recorded and used incident data. A review of the systems in place in the schools included in the site visits found that:

- Collection forms vary widely among schools,
- Serious incidents usually are reported to the district or state, and
- Victims and offenders are rarely reported in systems.

At most schools, disciplinary information was reviewed informally within the school. Principals and teachers were usually aware of the most prevalent types of disorder at their schools as well as which students were more likely to cause trouble. However, few schools had specific procedures in place to review incident data. In addition, very few schools seemed to follow guidelines recommended in 1996 by the National Center for Education Statistics task force on the collection and compilation of incident data. Neither the level of detail collected on particular incidents nor the unit of collection

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[1] As used, "serious crime" refers to crimes such as aggravated assault, weapons violations, and robbery.

(incident, victim, and offender) seemed to be in place in most schools to support the unit-based collection system recommended by the task force.

Efforts to Prevent Problem Behavior

We described efforts to prevent problem behavior in terms of the following major categories: (a) prevention activities, (b) school security, (c) school discipline practices and policies, and (d) school climate.

Prevention Activities. The review in this report is based on classifying prevention activities into 19 different types of programs using categories developed for an earlier phase of this study, which is based on national survey data (Gottfredson et al., 2000; Crosse, Burr, Cantor & Hantman, forthcoming). Our findings amplified those of the intermediate level study in that many programs discussed by site visitors did not meet minimal quality criteria along a number of basic characteristics, including financial support, frequency of participation by students, and monitoring and evaluation. These problems, we believe, reflect a view on the part of the schools that prevention programs do not generally play a critical role in preventing problem behavior in the school. In fact, many of the programs are being implemented within schools that are perceived as being relatively safe and not in great need of such programs. Particularly noticeable in these programs was the absence of data that documented the implementation process, as well as any formal or informal evaluation of the effectiveness of the programs.

School Security. The description of school security was divided into three areas: (a) school security staff, (b) law enforcement personnel, and (c) security devices and strategies. School security was the most common type of activity that administrators reported as specifically set up to prevent disorder in the school. The most prevalent security strategy used throughout the schools was various ways to monitor student and non-student movement within the school. The staff and administrators were primarily responsible for this task. Generally, other types of security strategies--such as hiring special security personnel, use of metal detectors, and random searches--were also used by a smaller number of schools. These additional strategies tended to be implemented in those schools where student movement and, perhaps safety, may be more of an issue (large, urban schools).

The implementation of many of these strategies was inconsistent. For example, site visitors observed a number of times when hall monitors were not consistently enforcing rules and procedures

(e.g., use of hall passes). Several site visitors found locks, intended to keep people out, that were broken. Video cameras, when they were in place, were not widely monitored by staff.

School Discipline Practices and Policies. We found considerable overlap in discipline procedures across schools. The rules were generally guided by the school district and involved varying levels of punishment as the offenses became more serious. Very few rewards were structured into the procedures. Schools seemed to have few problems with communicating the rules to all students. However, we found some evidence that rules are inconsistently enforced across students. How common inconsistent enforcement was across relatively minor and serious infractions is unclear. Many of these inconsistencies may stem from the general process of letting teachers handle many of the infractions within the classroom. As noted by a number of administrators, teachers do vary on how they deal with disorder problems. Much of the inconsistency reported by students may be related to these differences in individual style across teachers and other staff.

School Climate. We described school climate using a typology based on the school climate goals outlined by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement [OERI] (1993) and Kelly et al. (1986).

Staff/student relationships. The majority of the sites reported good communication between staff and students, although examples of high and low quality communication are described in the report. Site visitors observed that highly visible, communicative, and engaging principals had schools with some of the strongest climate relations. Students often described these principals as caring, approachable, and fair. Conversely, principals in schools with poor climate were often described by teachers and students as non-collaborative, unapproachable, unengaged and intimidating.

Goals. With respect to school goals, the schools in our sample were classified into four different types: (a) strong focus on academics, (b) focus on academics but struggling to improve performance, (c) mixed academic reputation but a strong emphasis on controlling disorder, and (d) great deal of emphasis on extra-curricular aspects.

Rules and procedures. Schools were described as having two basic approaches to rules and procedures. One was where teachers tended to deal with all but the most serious discipline problems, including setting punishment and calling parents (if necessary). The second approach tended to deal with small infractions within the classroom and then refer students to an administrator for repeated or more

serious infractions. The administrator was responsible for assigning punishment and contacting parents. Regardless of the approach, consistency of rule enforcement emerged as an important issue, especially among students (as expressed in the focus groups). This also re-emphasized the role of the principal in setting the overall tone in a school when it came to discipline and enforcement of rules. School staff expressed more satisfaction if the principal set clear expectations, communicated regularly with staff, and gave them a voice in management issues.

Facilities and environment. Most of the schools were described as being clean, both inside and outside. Vandalism was rarely seen. Some variety was found in the condition of the buildings. The community environments sometimes contrasted with the school. In this sense, some schools were clearly "safe-havens" for the students.

Planning

The study team developed a definition of sound planning and applied it when selecting six schools for detailed analysis. Once selected, the schools were contacted and asked to elaborate on the information that was initially elicited in the national survey. Respondents were asked about the kinds of school-level planning structures, the main functions of these structures, and the outcomes of the planning.

The kinds of school-level planning structures varied across schools. Regardless of variability, however, all of the schools had at least one school-level planning structure that regularly assessed (through formal or informal needs assessments) the need for reduction or prevention of problem behavior. This did not necessarily result in implementing prevention activities.

Distinguishing Middle Schools with Different Levels of Disorder

To conduct this analysis, a limited number of schools were identified as having "high" and "low" levels of disorder using the data from the student surveys. Schools were compared across the high and low disorder groups along school characteristics, community characteristics, prevention programs, security, discipline, and climate. This comparison was intended to identify policy-relevant factors that distinguished schools with high and low levels of disorder, with the intent of suggesting approaches that policy-makers and school personnel may wish to pursue to increase school safety.

Complicating this analysis was the fact that, as a whole, the 40 schools in our sample tended to have relatively low levels of disorder. Middle schools tended to have higher levels of disorder than

high schools. For the high schools, less than five percent of students in the low disorder schools had experienced being robbed or threatened with a weapon; approximately 16 percent of students in the high disorder schools were victims of such violent incidents. This range (11%) was exceeded by the range for the middle schools (33%). Between 28 and 37 percent of students in high disorder middle schools experienced one or more violent incidents. Because of the limited range in disorder among the high schools, this analysis was restricted to middle schools.

What seemed to most clearly distinguish the high and low disorder schools? Not surprisingly, school and community characteristics were clearly important. The high disorder schools tended to have higher levels of poverty, unemployment, and other risk factors associated with community disorder. Schools that were ranked high on disorder tended to have more programs specifically targeting reduction of problem behavior and had considerably more security arrangements (e.g., school security devices). This seemed to be driven primarily by the level of perceived need of the school. Low disorder schools did not allocate their resources towards prevention programs when they did not feel it was warranted. This is especially true for security devices.

The most important policy-relevant differences between the two groups of middle schools were related to discipline practices and climate. Low disorder schools were characterized by several important characteristics, including strong principals, school staff viewing themselves as working as a team, active involvement of teachers in maintaining order inside and outside the classroom, and generally positive relationships among staff and students. In contrast, high disorder schools lacked a clear approach to discipline, did not convey expectations to students well, and demonstrated poor communication between teachers and administrators.

This last result reinforces the finding that managing a school and the effects of this management on school climate is vitally important to keeping schools safe and secure. While programs to prevent violence undoubtedly play some role in reducing violence, very little evidence from this study indicated that this is what distinguishes schools with high and low levels of disorder. In fact, this study suggests that the use of prevention programs is, in part, a reaction to disorder. As a result, schools with higher levels of disorder seem to implement more prevention programs than schools with lower levels.

SCHOOL CRIME PATTERNS:
A NATIONAL PROFILE OF U.S. PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS USING RATES OF CRIME REPORTED TO POLICE

SUMMARY

This report profiles violence in U.S. public high schools. It is based on analysis of data from a U.S. Department of Education survey of school principals that asked about the number and types of crimes they reported to police for the 1996-97 school year. The analysis shows that violence is clustered within a relatively small percentage of locations, with about 60 percent of the violence occurring in 4 percent of the schools. This is about four times higher than would be expected based on national rates of crime.

High schools are grouped by the nature and level of crimes occurring in the school. Four patterns emerge from this grouping: 1) No Crime, 2) Isolated Crime, 3) Moderate Crime and 4) Violent Crime. High schools in each group are described in terms of their student population characteristics, community characteristics, and school violence prevention efforts.

The results indicate that the characteristics (size, location, socio-economic make-up) of high-violence schools differ markedly from the other schools. High schools with the highest levels of violence tended to be located in urban areas and have a high percentage of minority students, compared to high schools that reported no crime to the police. They also tended to be located in areas with high social disadvantage and residential mobility. It should be noted, however, that a relatively large minority of the schools in the Violent Crime group were located in rural areas (36%), so that the image of school violence being solely restricted to central cities is not accurate.

The types of violence prevention programs differed between crime groups. The schools that experience a high level of serious violence also reported high use of prevention measures and programs that were specifically aimed at controlling violence. Schools in the Violent Crime group appeared to put more emphasis on programs geared toward changing individual behavior, such as behavioral modification or other types of individual attention. This contrasted with high schools in the other three crime groups, which tended to place a higher priority on prevention instruction or counselors within the school.

Similarly, the Violent Crime group was more likely than the other groups to adopt a variety of security measures to reduce risk of crimes, particularly random metal detectors, used by about one-

third of the Violent Crime group (compared to 10% or less in the other groups). The crime groups also differed in their use of law enforcement and security personnel. The schools in the Violent Crime group were more likely to use this as a measure to control disorder than were schools with lower levels of crime.

These observations indicate that schools with the greatest need (i.e., highest rate of violent crime) took action at a fairly high rate (e.g., around two-thirds of the schools reported using many of the programs/activities). A follow-up question is whether these programs are effective at reducing violence. The current analysis did not allow for assessment of whether programs were implemented in an effective way and/or significantly reduced the amount of violence in the school.

The report suggests that methods to prevent school violence be tailored to the level and type of crime problems that schools are experiencing. Also, future evaluation of prevention methods should put some emphasis on schools experiencing the most severe problems. Comparing these schools to those with a similar profile but lower levels of disorder would be especially useful. This would provide an efficient and cost-effective way to better understand how to significantly reduce crime in the nation's high schools.

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